

I-3 proposal too early to worry Barrett, Graham

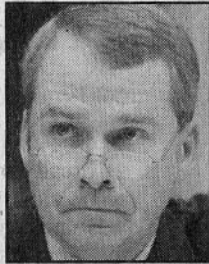
Lawmakers aware of county's opposition to potential future interstate cutting through area

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WALHALLA — Neither U.S. Rep. Gresham Barrett nor Sen. Lindsey Graham are about to lose any sleep worrying about early-stage plans for an interstate that could cut through or near Oconee County.

Aides to the congressman and senator said both are aware of a resolution approved unanimously last week by the Oconee County Council. That document hopes to nip in the bud any plans for the building of Interstate 3.

The Federal Highway Administration approved \$1.3 million to fund a feasibility and needs study for a highway linking Knoxville, Tenn. to Savannah, Ga. A look at any map shows the straightest path for such a connection would place Oconee in the crosshairs.



Barrett

In their resolution, council members said an I-3 project "would have a devastating environmental, economic, cultural and aesthetic impact." The resolution adds that neither South Carolina nor Oconee was consulted beforehand on legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress by the

Georgia Congressional Delegation calling for an interstate highway through the Southern Appalachian mountains.

B.J. Boling, a spokesman for Barrett out of the congressman's district office in Aiken, said the I-3 proposal is so much in its early stages that it's hard for Barrett to take a concrete stand

on it.

"If at any time he believes the plan would be detrimental to the community, he would oppose it," Boling said.

Graham spokesman Kevin Bishop said the senator thinks it's helpful that Oconee County Council members have made their views known on the issue early in the process. However, Bishop said that when it comes to the construction of a new interstate in South Carolina, the focus in the coming years would be on I-73 and not I-3.

Interstate 73 would run from Myrtle Beach to Detroit.

"While the Interstate has taken several steps forward, there remains more work that must be completed to turn I-73 into reality," Bishop said.

Shelley Robbins, Project Coordinator at



Graham

the Upstate Forever Spartanburg office, doesn't think it's premature to be voicing concerns about a potential I-3 project. Upstate Forever is a group that promotes smart growth in the region and strives to protect the area's prized resources.

"The winners, if I-3 were built, would be the Port of Savannah, Augusta (Georgia) and Knoxville," Robbins said. "South Carolina would get a handful of truck stops, a lot more ground level ozone and particulate matter, and tons of stormwater runoff that could warm the streams and kill parts of the trout fishery."